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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: HAVANA: INITIAL THOUGHTS ON THE WAY FORWARD

REF: A. HAVANA 0597

[1](#)B. STATE 69190

Classified By: Chief of Mission, Jonathan D. Farrar, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Following are some early impressions and requests from the COM's first two weeks on the ground.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Connecting with the Cuban people is extremely important, and extremely challenging.

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- The GOC focuses intensely on isolating USINT from Cuban society. The USINT building is isolated by the GOC police guards. There are no idle passers-by: only Cubans with appointments are able to approach the building. Only the most intrepid Cuban could catch a glimpse of the USINT billboard.

- Even the most committed leaders of the opposition can be intimidated by the guard presence. Following a DVC at USINT last week, one of the bedrocks of the opposition declined to accept office supplies from USINT's human rights officer until the "Cambio" bag in which they had been placed was itself put into a plain plastic bag to carry out.

- The geographic travel limits are debilitating for outreach efforts, and are getting tighter. The recent transfer of an Amcit prisoner from Holguin means that Matanzas, a two hour drive away, is the furthest point for future consular visits.

Reaching Out, and Reaching Back  
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[1](#)3. (C/NF) The challenge for us at USINT is to find new ways to reach out beyond the confines of the USINT building, and to reach back to Washington for information from programs that originate there. We must build our support for the democratic opposition while finding new ways to reach out to the broad spectrum of Cuban society.

[1](#)4. (C/NF) Reaching Out in Cuba:

- More PD activities that appeal to Cuban youth, many of whom are restless and dissatisfied with their prospects. More DVCs with a youth focus, especially at venues other than USINT, e.g., COM and other residences, connecting Cubans to their counterparts in U.S. colleges and universities. USINT will look for ways to leverage interest here in the Internet and in learning English.

- Take full advantage of the limited opportunities for travel outside Havana. The Coast Guard repatriates migrants at Cabanas on a weekly or twice weekly basis. There are less frequent opportunities through counternarcotics events and prison visits. For the upcoming prison visit to Matanzas, we have added in a notice (which we expect to be refused) that we will monitor repatriated Cubans in Matanzas.

- Use GOC policy changes to our advantage. We will look into electronic and other items we may procure locally rather than exacerbating the backlogs in the unclassified pouch. As access to computers increases here, we also will seek Washington's assistance in providing means to work around

Internet filters.

- More monitoring visits to Cubans repatriated to Havana. These visits are done without advance notice, and can be done throughout the province.
- Pursue suggestions from the NED and others for initial contacts within Cuban academia. This likely will be tough sledding. We face some of the same barriers in rebuilding cultural contacts, given our limited prospects for cultural exchanges.
- Religious and humanitarian organizations. There is a wealth of opportunity among the different religious denominations, and humanitarian organizations.
- Third country outreach. If the EU is serious about a dialogue with Cuba on human rights, we will be serious about consulting with them and others on complementary efforts to promote human rights.
- Surveying our visa applicants, who are our best available proxy for Cuban society, on which PD efforts resonate and which do not. What are their sources of information, and what would be of interest to them?

#### 15. (C/NF) Reaching Back to DC:

- DRL already is working to provide to USINT information from quarterly reports by grantees. We are particularly interested in information on activities outside of Havana. Unclassified reports from grantees will be shifted to the class side before being sent to USINT. We request that USAID set up a similar mechanism.
- USINT will reach out to U.S. human rights organizations, many of whom travel regularly to Cuba and have contacts that we do not. Assistance from DRL or others who have a heads-up on such visits would be appreciated.
- We ask that OFAC include language in its licenses for humanitarian, religious, and other organization visits to encourage visitors to contact USINT. A heads-up on such potential travel would be appreciated, and USINT can take it from there.
- As we support the democratic opposition here, we will look to Washington programs to increase support as well. We welcome the imminent launch of DRL's FY-07 grant to fund human rights and democracy activities on the ground here. USINT will forward this week several initial nominations for DRL's Human Rights Defenders Fund to support activists who are under constant GOC pressure.
- As we implement the Department's new guidelines on courier activities by USINT personnel (reftels), we look for Washington's help to ease inevitable bumps along the way by facilitating OFAC licenses where necessary. Our goal is to avoid unintended cutoffs of worthy, ongoing activities. We also will work with Washington to prioritize PD materials sent to us via the pouch.

#### 16. (C/NF) Contacts with the GOC:

- We will be testing the GOC in the weeks and months ahead on its willingness to engage on issues that impact USINT's operations.
- Via dip note, we have requested a courtesy call by the COM on MINREX. We await a response. COM made note of this in his July 29, off-the-record initial gathering with the press corps.
- USINT informed the GOC of the COM's participation in last week's Coast Guard repatriation, and the upcoming meeting between the incoming and outgoing Coast Guard representatives and the GOC Ministry of Interior Border Guards and Counternarcotics officials. USINT's Coast Guard

representative has the most extensive contact with GOC officials of anyone in the mission.

¶7. (C/NF) With the lifting of the Congressional hold on FY-08 democracy programs, now is the time to increase our activities across the board to engage the people of Cuba. USINT COM and the entire USINT staff look forward to working with Washington to meet this challenge in the weeks and months ahead.

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